

Graveland - Thunderbolts Of The Gods (2013)

Written by bluelover

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1 *Thunderbolts Of The Gods* 7:10 2 *Red Polaris* 8:10 3 *Possessed By Steel* 8:30 4 *Chamber Of The Wicked Tears* 7:31 5 *Wolf Of The North* 9:09 6 *When Hammer Shines (Outro)* 2:26 Chorus – Alruna, Rob Darken Guitars, Bass, Drums], Vocals, Keyboards – Rob Darken

When it comes to innovation, few acts have as divided a discography as Graveland. From its inception in 1992 until 2002's *Memory and Density* Graveland underwent constant reinvention. From the pitch black sounds of *Carpathian Wolves* to the rowdy folk metal of *Thousand Swords* to the bombastic symphonic metal of *Immortal Pride*, no two Graveland records sounded alike. Then, out of nowhere, Rob Darken's songwriting stopped evolving. Since 2003 Graveland has remained snugly embedded within the style of symphonic viking metal. Each of the last six records has offered the same formula: seven to ten minute songs that shift between melodic riffs backed by divine choirs, and harsher, attacking blackened riffs accentuated by Rob's grizzled rasp.

Graveland's twelfth full length, *Thunderbolts of the Gods*, offers few surprises. It's another serving of symphonic viking metal, so for those who have grown tired of Rob's take on the style, this record has little to offer. However, for those who enjoy Rob's take on the style, *Thunderbolts of the Gods* is one of the stronger and more consistent Graveland records of the past decade. Part of the strength of *Thunderbolts of the Gods* comes from its concision. While most of Graveland's recent releases have offered a few unforgettable tracks, they also tend to be bogged down with filler. *Thunderbolts of the Gods* consists of five songs plus an outro, adding up to forty-three minutes. Every track is memorable in itself and each track offers a unique enough mood to distinguish itself from its neighbors. The title track is dark and foreboding, "Possessed by Steel" beams with bombast and glory, and "Chamber of Wicked Tears" is somber and melancholic.

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There's no denying that the songwriting is formulaic. Each track starts out on the soft side, with moody chanting, synths and guitar before gradually building toward primitive, militant riffs. The songs tend to ebb back and forth between the attacking, riff-driven passages and the glorious, choir-based choruses. Despite the predictability, the songwriting is effective. The contrast between brutality and beauty consistently creates an excellent sense of drama.

There is one other minor improvement on Thunderbolts of the Gods. On Graveland's previous record, Spears of Heaven, the drum programming was annoyingly repetitive, with the same fills being used throughout the record. Here, the drum programming is more dynamic, with a nice range of fills and a fresh, lively tone.

For those who enjoyed Graveland's recent efforts, Thunderbolts of the Gods is well worth listening to. There's nothing groundbreaking here, but if you're craving a solid cut of epic viking metal, this album will definitely satisfy. ---CrimsonFloyd, metal-archives.com

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